Developmental Communication Milestones

A Parent Observation Guide for Families in Dubai

Based on NHS Child Development Guidance and Widely Recognised Developmental Milestones

Communication develops gradually during the early years of life, and every child follows their own developmental journey. While there is natural variation in when children reach different milestones, tracking your child's communication over time can help you recognise new skills, celebrate progress, and identify when it may be helpful to seek further advice.

For families in Dubai, communication development often takes place in multilingual environments. Many children hear two or more languages at home, nursery, or within their wider community. When considering developmental milestones, it is important to look at your child's overall communication skills across all languages rather than focusing on a single language.

This guide is based on NHS child development guidance and other widely recognised developmental references used by speech and language therapists and developmental professionals. It is intended as a practical observation guide rather than a diagnostic tool.

At **Small Steps Big Dreams**, we encourage families to use milestone guides as a way of understanding their child's development over time. If you have ongoing concerns about communication, these observations can also provide useful information to share with a qualified healthcare professional.

1. Developmental Communication Milestones

6 to 9 Months: Pre-Linguistic Foundations

Before spoken words emerge, babies develop the early communication skills that form the foundation for later speech and language development. At this stage, focus on how your child uses their eyes, voice, gestures, and facial expressions to connect with you.

- **Receptive Language:** Turns towards a familiar voice or everyday sounds. Looks at you when you say their name during daily routines.
- **Expressive Language:** Babbles using repeated sounds (e.g., **"ba-ba-ba," "ma-ma-ma"**). Uses different sounds to express excitement, happiness, or frustration.
- **Social & Connection:** Maintains eye contact during feeding, singing, or interactive play. Laughs during games such as peek-a-boo or when sharing enjoyable interactions.

Parent Tip – Growing Up Multilingual

If your child hears more than one language at home, focus on how they respond to familiar people and routines rather than which language is being spoken. Early communication skills develop across all languages.

12 Months (1 Year): Early Communication

By around their first birthday, many children are beginning to understand that words and gestures help people communicate with one another. They are moving from primarily listening to actively communicating.

- **Receptive Language:** Follows simple requests when paired with a natural gesture (e.g., **holding out your hand and saying, "Give it to Mummy."**)
- **Expressive Language:** Uses one or two meaningful words or consistent word approximations (e.g., **"Mama," "Dada," "up,"** or saying **"ba"** consistently for **"ball."**)
- **Social & Connection:** Points to objects they want or want to show you, helping establish **joint attention** (sharing attention towards the same object or activity).

18 Months: The Vocabulary Spark

Movement is becoming more confident, and many children begin using language more consistently to communicate their wants, needs, and interests.

- **Receptive Language:** Points to familiar body parts or objects when asked (e.g., **"Where's your nose?"** or **"Show me the teddy."**)
- **Expressive Language:** Uses around **10–15 meaningful words** consistently across all languages spoken at home.
- **Social & Connection:** Waves goodbye independently, shakes their head for "no," or brings toys to familiar adults to share or ask for help.

24 Months (2 Years): The Phrase Builder

Around two years of age, many children begin combining words into simple phrases to communicate ideas more clearly.

- **Receptive Language:** Follows a simple two-step instruction without needing a gesture (e.g., **"Pick up your shoes and put them by the door."**)
- **Expressive Language:** Combines two words naturally (e.g., **"More milk," "Daddy go," "Big car."**)
- **Social & Connection:** Enjoys copying everyday activities during pretend play, such as feeding a doll or talking on a toy phone.

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3 Years: The Conversationalist

As children approach preschool age, communication becomes increasingly important for participating in conversations, play, and group learning.

- **Receptive Language:** Understands simple concepts such as **"under," "on,"** and **"in"** (e.g., **"Put the teddy under the chair."**)
- **Expressive Language:** Uses regular three-to-four-word sentences. Familiar adults understand around **75%** of what they say.
- **Social & Connection:** Asks simple questions such as **"Who?" "What?"** and **"Where?"** while exploring their environment or talking with others.

4 Years: Preparing for School

By four years of age, many children are preparing for FS2 or KG1. Communication skills continue to support participation in classroom routines, friendships, and early learning.

- **Receptive Language:** Follows a three-step instruction during everyday routines (e.g., **"Get your bag, put your lunchbox inside, and bring it to me."**)
- **Expressive Language:** Uses longer sentences of five or more words and is beginning to use grammar more consistently (e.g., pronouns such as **"I," "you," "he,"** and **"she."**)
- **Social & Connection:** Talks about something that happened earlier in the day (e.g., describing a nursery activity or a trip to the park).

2. Parent Observation Notes

Keeping a simple record of your child's communication over time can help you notice new skills, recognise patterns in development, and provide useful information if you decide to seek professional advice.

You do not need to record every interaction. Instead, focus on meaningful examples of new communication skills that you observe during everyday routines such as mealtimes, play, outings, or nursery.

Date	Area of Communication	What I Observed	Where or With Whom
Example	Expressive Language	Said "More juice" independently.	Breakfast at home with Mum.

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Parent Note

Communication develops through everyday interactions. Recording observations over several weeks can provide a clearer picture of your child's progress than relying on a single day or one specific milestone.

If your child attends nursery or spends time with grandparents, a nanny, or other caregivers, it can also be helpful to include their observations, as children sometimes demonstrate different communication skills in different environments.

3. When to Consider Seeking Professional Advice

Every child develops at their own pace, and it is common for parents to have questions about communication during the early years.

If you notice that your child is finding communication difficult across several areas, or if you have ongoing concerns about their speech, language, understanding, or social communication, discussing these concerns with a qualified healthcare professional can provide reassurance and guidance.

Some families seek advice because they have noticed slower communication development than expected, while others simply want a better understanding of how their child is progressing.

A developmental or speech and language assessment does not always lead to a diagnosis or ongoing therapy. In many cases, it provides reassurance, practical strategies for home, or recommendations for monitoring progress over time.

At **Small Steps Big Dreams**, our speech and language therapists take the time to understand each child's individual communication profile. Assessments consider a child's strengths, interests, play skills, understanding, expressive language, social communication, and the languages they hear and use in everyday life.

Where appropriate, our team uses evidence-informed assessment tools alongside clinical observation, parent interviews, and professional judgement to build a comprehensive understanding of each child's communication development.

Following assessment, families receive practical recommendations that are tailored to their child's individual strengths and needs. These may include strategies to use at home, guidance for nursery or school, or individualised speech and language therapy where appropriate.

Supporting Your Child's Communication Journey

Communication develops through everyday experiences.

Reading together, singing songs, talking during mealtimes, playing games, sharing books, and responding to your child's attempts to communicate all help build strong foundations for speech and language development.

Small, consistent interactions throughout the day often have the greatest impact.

If you have concerns, seeking advice early is not about expecting something to be wrong. It is about understanding your child's development and ensuring they have the opportunities and support they need to communicate confidently.

At **Small Steps Big Dreams**, we are proud to support families across Dubai through evidence-informed speech and language assessment, early intervention, and individualised therapy programmes. Our goal is to help every child develop meaningful communication skills that support participation at home, in nursery, at school, and within the wider community.

Take the Next Step

If you would like to learn more about your child's communication development, our team is here to help.

Book a Speech and Language Assessment with Small Steps Big Dreams to gain a clearer understanding of your child's communication strengths and areas where additional support may be beneficial.

You can also explore our parent resources to learn more about:

- Early communication development
- Speech and language milestones
- Bilingual language development
- School readiness in Dubai
- Early intervention services
- Speech and language therapy in Dubai

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